

VIRTUAL TEAM LEADERSHIP SPECIAL CHALLENGES FOR MANAGERS

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INTRODUCTION

The necessity of working more in virtual teams arises on the one hand against the background of the “special situation” of the Corona pandemic, and on the other hand, within the “general situation”, a change in the population structure has already been observed for a few years: The potential and demands of the new labour force (Huber & Rauch, 2013: 10) are changing. While for earlier generations a secure job and a good salary were enough to stay with an employer for a very long time, this is no longer enough for the younger generations (Klingelhöfer, 2019). Where tight leadership was the norm in the past, young employees today demand explanation, transparency and participation (Huber & Rauch, 2013: 10). Employees between the ages of 20 and 35 expect good jobs, assume high material standards, demand a work-life balance and family-friendly conditions from the employer. They want to participate and be asked for their opinion (Huber & Rauch, 2013: 14).

The young generationers will increasingly be given the choice regarding their employer and choose the offer that convinces them the most (Hansen & Hauff 2019: 38-39). The design of a successful work-life balance strategy, flexible working time models and targeted training opportunities are essential components of an attractive “employer branding” (Hansen & Hauff 2019: 43). The flexibility in workplace design expected by the new generations of employees to ensure a subjectively individual work-life balance means that teams no longer work and exchange ideas

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in shared offices as they did a few years ago, but increasingly perform their work on a mobile basis or in a home office.

The German police forces at federal and state level must also face up to this development in order to continue to be attractive employers in the future and to be able to hold their own against innovative competitors on the labour market. The Corona pandemic acted as a kind of catalyst for this development and triggered an enormous innovation push towards more flexible work. Organisations, employees and managers were forced to deal with the issue of virtual working in a very short time in order to strengthen the crisis resilience of the organisation and to remain fit for work and the future. In addition to this aspect of increasing flexibility and the associated virtualisation of workplaces, the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) is also faced with the organisational challenge that various departments and groups are distributed across the Berlin, Meckenheim and Wiesbaden locations, and department and group heads do not have direct, analogue access to their employees. This means that for certain hierarchical levels, the requirements of leadership at a distance have existed for a long time. Virtual working is more and more perceived as a way to build a bridge between the demands of new employees and the needs of the organisation. Through a more flexible design, not only new employees can be gained, but also employees who were forced to reduce their presence work due to family situations can be integrated more flexibly. In this way, their wealth of experience can continue to serve as a resource for the organisation (Schwöder, 2021).

PROCEDURE

In the Master's thesis on which this article is based, the effects of the increasing virtualisation of work on leadership performance were examined (Langmaack, 2009). Since the concept of leadership performance is sufficiently vague, leadership performance was subdivided into the following three points, based on Ruth Cohn's model of "theme-centred interaction" (TCI):

I Performance/Task completion

II Caring for the individual employee

III Group cohesion

The division of leadership performance into a task-related, an employee-related and a group-related aspect also formed the core of guideline-based interviews with experts. The interviews were conducted with management trainers and consultants with expert knowledge in the field of "virtual leadership" in order to find out how leadership should be designed within a virtual environment. The interim



result of an extensive literature research conducted in advance and the result of the evaluation of the interviews with experts in the field of “virtual leadership” were brought together in the much more extensive master’s thesis to form a TARGET status. This interim result is reproduced below. The results of the interviews with the managers of the Federal Criminal Police Office were also an essential part of the master’s thesis, but they are not published because of the partly very personal views and experiences of the interview partners.

THE RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS WITH THE MANAGEMENT TRAINERS

a) Performance/Task completion

In order to be able to delegate tasks in a targeted manner, it is necessary for the manager to create technical, organisational and interpersonal conditions that enable employees to complete tasks in the required quality and within the required time. Within a virtual working environment, in which there is usually a physical separation between managers and employees, technical requirements play a greater role in the context of communication than in an analogue working environment, since the possibilities for direct contact and feedback are lacking. According to the management trainers, managers are challenged to ensure within the framework of delegation that employees receive all the necessary information to complete the task and that the individually required competence and the necessary time capacities are available. Furthermore, the manager must constantly monitor the process in order to ensure that the completion of the task develops in the desired direction. This observation is more difficult in the context of virtual leadership due to the physical distance and requires a demand-oriented communicative accompaniment of the task assignment or delegation. In the opinion of the management trainers, the challenge here is to design control loops on the part of the manager in such a way that, on the one hand, they are appropriate to the importance of the task and the abilities of the employee, but on the other hand, they are not set so tightly that the employee feels a sense of mistrust and is possibly demotivated as a result. As in the analogue environment, the type and extent of delegation should be based on the employee’s level of maturity, for example. The main difference to the analogue environment is based on the type of accompanying communication. In the opinion of the management trainer, it is therefore necessary for the manager to take into account not only the maturity level of the employee, but also the individual communication needs and the personal circumstances of the employee, which are largely determined by the individual environment. Within an analogue office environment, it is much easier to develop this empathy and to establish and maintain appropriate social contacts.



The topic of “supervision and control” is closely linked to the delegation of tasks. Therefore, the recommendation of the management trainers is to also align supervision with the maturity level of the employee. The art within virtual leadership is to find the right time and the right medium for regular contact with the employee in order to exercise supervision and control to the above-mentioned appropriate extent. Identifying the right time intervals is more difficult in the virtual environment than in an analogue environment, as the manager lacks the possibility of constant and occasion-related observation. In the virtual environment, it is hardly possible to get an indication of the state of affairs in short “hallway conversations”. Therefore, from the management trainer’s point of view, it is important for managers to develop sensitivity and so-called “remote skills”³ in order to find the right time to make contact. This contact should be based on “relationship management”, which takes into account both personal competences and skills as well as the individual communication needs of the employee. As also described by the experts of the BKA, the necessary communication with the employees within the virtual environment requires more time than is the case in an analogue working environment. The reasons for the additional effort are, in particular, the spatial separation, the lack of face-to-face meetings with individual employees or the team and difficulties in accessibility, which can be traced back to different daily routines within the framework of the flexibility gained and personal environmental conditions. Therefore, it is necessary to review work processes for their suitability with regard to virtual requirements and to update them in order to be able to use resources for additional communication needs. This presents the organisation with two challenges: On the one hand, the existing processes are already subject to a constant review with regard to existing optimisation possibilities, and on the other hand, due to the virtual isolation of the employees, creative cooperation, which is necessary within the framework of the constant improvement processes, is more difficult to organise.

According to the observation of the management trainers, optimisations within the framework of a continuous improvement process are mostly generated from within the team during joint work on topics. Due to the spatial separation and the resulting impeded creative collaboration, there is currently often an innovation backlog. These negative effects of virtuality with regard to creative collaboration within the framework of task completion were also attested to by the BKA experts. According to the management trainers, innovative solutions and, if necessary, a paradigm shift are needed to create space for new forms of virtual cooperation using available communication media in order to enable and establish creative processes and teamwork in the virtual environment. On the basis of this creative

³ “Remote skills” are key qualifications that are helpful for successful virtual leadership. These include, for example: empathy, adaptability, digital competence, time management and communication skills.



cooperation, existing work processes must be further developed and restructured in order to reduce the workload of managers so that resources for communication in the virtual work environment can be released and used. This requires an input of time and personal resources, combined with intrinsic motivation on the part of the employees and courage on the part of the organisation to allow innovations within established processes. Without a corresponding culture of change, existing processes will be maintained, in which no freedom can arise that is necessary to meet the requirements of virtual leadership.

From the interviews with the management trainers and from the literature analysed, it emerges that trust between employees and managers is built up in particular through mutual, positive experiences. Positive experiences result, among other things, from transparency in everyday decisions and from the fact that the manager also represents the interests of the employees vis-à-vis higher hierarchical levels. Transparency within virtual leadership can only be achieved through additional communication with the team and the individual. Trusting cooperation always has to do with openness and a positive culture of error. This is particularly evident in the reaction of the manager when mistakes are made within the work process. Especially in critical situations, open discussions and, if necessary, appropriate support in finding a solution must precede any sanctions. Trust is also created through professional closeness. This closeness is generated within an analogue working environment through presence and responsiveness. Within the virtual environment, it must therefore be constantly signalled that one is available as a leader for discussions, concerns and issues. Constructive praise and criticism of work are further means of establishing closeness with employees, both in the analogue and in the virtual working environment. In the context of virtual leadership, trust can also be built by explaining in an appreciative way why the assignment is being delegated, why the employee is being delegated, and why the employee is being delegated the right person for the job and why the task is important.

But even apart from factual communication, regular conversations are important, for example, to inform the manager about the personal situation. Through the resulting bond, the manager signals a genuine interest in the employee, which leads to professional closeness and a positive feeling of appreciation and promotes trust. According to the experience of the management trainers, it is important for many employees to have regular personal contact with other employees and the manager, especially against the background of increasing social isolation within the virtual working environment, in order to be able to build trust in the team and the management. This is also confirmed by the BKA experts. On the other hand, in order to strengthen the trust of managers in employees, it is necessary that a positive basic assumption is anchored in the personality of the manager or at least that the potential for this is present. On the other hand, it is important to estab-



lish structures and rituals that allow transparency with regard to the availability of employees and the processing status of delegated tasks. These rituals could be attendance lists, morning e-mails, short “dailies/check-ins” or video-based after-work rounds. These rituals must be initiated by the managers and maintained by the employees themselves. This builds up a two-way flow of communication, creates transparency and strengthens mutual trust.

According to both the management trainers and the literature analysed, the delegation of over- and under-demanding tasks is one of the greatest de-motivators. Therefore, as a manager, it is important to consider the employee individually and to assign him or her tasks that correspond to his or her abilities or that challenge him or her in such a way that he or she can develop in a feasible way with the task. As already described in connection with delegation, according to the assessment of the management trainers in the virtual environment it is important to accompany the distribution of tasks in a communicative way and to point out the meaning and connections of the assignment. Creating a positive environment in which it is fun to work also has a motivating effect. To this end, discussions should also be held with the individual employees to find out which factors contribute to demotivation and how these factors can be positively influenced together. Within a virtual environment, the technical component plays an outstanding role. According to the management trainers, non-functioning technology, interrupted video conferences due to line problems or slow data exchange with the company server have a strong demotivating effect.

In this respect, it was also described by the BKA experts that due to insufficient technical framework conditions, one has to resort to communication media that transport the factual level but disregard the non-verbal channels of communication. Especially in a virtual environment, media should be used that can transport non-verbal aspects of communication and thus promote social presence. This is the only way that managers can pick up on the mood, the state of mind and the reactions of the employees in order to be able to assess the motivational situation in the team and in the individual team member. This is only possible to a very limited extent on the basis of a written report. Here, for example, tighter control loops (see above) must be established in order not to “lose sight” of these employees. Particularly in the context of virtual leadership, there is a danger that intrinsically motivated employees are assigned more tasks by the leadership than more inconspicuous employees. This is due, on the one hand, to the proactive attitude to work and the constant willingness of these employees to take on tasks and, on the other hand, to the communication that takes place within the framework of delegation and the associated easier access to the employee. This leads to an imbalance in the distribution of tasks. In extreme cases, this could lead to an overload of the top performers and an underload of the other employees, which would lead to demo-

tivation in both groups in the medium term. High performers would possibly feel overtaxed and exploited and the other employees would possibly feel less valued and successful. In spite of limited communication and perception possibilities, it is important for managers to ensure a balance, even if this means an additional effort in terms of communication and controls within the framework of delegation. If the established work and communication concepts continue to be adhered to, which do not take into account the additional communication requirements, the motivation of the employees will decrease and the commitment will diminish, which will lead to a loss of performance in the medium term (Schwöder, 2021).

b) Caring

As has already been shown in the topic area of “task completion”, the key to successful delegation, as well as to building trust and motivation, is a communication concept that is geared to the requirements of the virtual environment. According to the management trainers, this orientation refers to the media mix to be used, the communication needs of the individual employee and the team as a whole, as well as the establishment of fixed deadlines and fixed time budgets. The choice of communication media must be based on the content to be conveyed and the result to be achieved. Purely factual messages and information can be conveyed by using asynchronous media such as e-mail or synchronous communication such as telephone conferences. As long as the purpose of the communication is limited to this type of message, there is therefore the possibility of making it less onerous channels that are necessary. Since successful communication should not be limited to the purely factual level, this concept should also include space for personal communication with the team and individual employees. For messages that contain more than just factual information, media should be used that also allow non-verbal information to be sent and received. Here, the focus is on media such as video conferences or video telephony. Experience from coaching and consulting shows that in order to develop a needs-based communication concept, it is often necessary to initiate behavioural changes in managers in order to break down entrenched ways of acting and mental barriers. Communication needs are occasion-related, time-bound, but also spontaneous. In order to meet these needs, a mix of media should be used that takes into account the employees’ own resources on the one hand and the needs that arise from the social isolation in which they find themselves in the home office on the other. This brings us full circle to the necessity of reviewing and optimising existing work processes in order to create more resources for needs-based communication.

The topic of “personal care” is closely linked to the topics of “trust”, “motivation” and “motivation”. “Communication practice” is linked. As described above, an appropriate communication concept also includes planning with regard to communication with individual employees. It is crucial that the concept takes into



account the personal communication needs of the individual. Is the employee a “close person” who lacks the routines of the analogue work environment and feels the personal responsibility gained through mobile working as a stressor, or is the employee a “digital native” who has already completed parts of his or her training virtually and attaches less importance to regular interpersonal contact with the manager. Regular contact between managers and employees should become ritualised and integrated into the daily work process as a matter of course. This establishment of communication routines is important because within a virtual working environment it cannot be assumed that everything is fine unless the manager hears something to the contrary. It is the manager’s responsibility to follow up and bring about a change in communication culture. Depending on the needs, the management trainers consider a communication cycle of 6 to a maximum of 10 days to be appropriate, in which employees and managers get in touch to have an opportunity to discuss the current situation, motivators / demotivators as well as personal sensitivities beyond the factual task. These communication rituals should provide structure, which is often lacking within the virtual task completion and contribute to the manager getting a well-founded impression of the employee.

The employees’ state of mind, personal feelings and work performance. These aspects of care have a direct impact on motivation and mutual trust. According to the management trainers, individual staff development in particular is currently faltering because there are hardly any “remote” offers and face-to-face seminars can only take place to a very limited extent due to the current Corona situation. Here, the pandemic has generated a clear acceleration effect and an innovation push with regard to remote training, webinars and other virtual training offers. It is now up to the managers to interest the employees in these offers and to reduce possible resistance to using these new formats. With regard to the fixed and regular cooperation and appraisal meetings, not much changes within the virtual performance of tasks. These formats should be conducted, if not within a direct conversation in the office, at least face-to-face via a video call, if necessary supported by a written deposit. Especially in these conversations, it is necessary to also exchange non-verbal signals, which is not possible via a telephone call or a purely written exchange.

c) Team building / group cohesion

The interviews with the management trainers shed light on the fact that, in addition to the dissolution of boundaries (see point 4b), the topic of “integrating new employees” into the team represents another major challenge within the virtual working environment. The integration of new team members is longer and more difficult at a distance. The formation of fixed learning and integration mentors facilitates the familiarisation and arrival in the new team, even in a dislocated

position. According to the BKA experts, a similar approach is already being taken by appointing “bear leaders” within the BKA. If direct on-site familiarisation is not possible, the management trainers are of the opinion that integration can only take place through a lot of face-to-face communication and close ties to the “bear leaders”, despite the appointment of corresponding mentors.

Communication with the team that is needs-based, topic- and employee-oriented is a critical component of a communication concept to be established in virtual cooperation. According to the management trainers, team meetings should also be held at least once a week in the virtual working environment. If there is the possibility of video conferencing, this medium should be used despite the additional effort involved, because the team is the focus of this form of communication. Therefore, it should be avoided that only the manager passes on information during team meetings. This can be achieved if there is a team member is enabled to make a contribution, for example through the method of circle moderation (or moderation circle). Another possibility is that topics are put on the agenda directly by the team members and implemented in a leading role, results are presented and findings and information are exchanged. This strengthens networking within the team and promotes the assumption of responsibility by the staff. It can be helpful for the team rounds to be moderated. This moderation should support a climate of openness within the meeting, in which each member is also happy to contribute. This can also take place in a kind of cycle, be based on voluntariness or be done by the manager. As was reported during the survey of the BKA experts, the size of the teams in particular poses problems for the video conferencing system. In this regard, the management trainers recommend that larger teams should be split into focus groups or honeycomb structures. This would still allow the use of video systems and at the same time increase the team members’ willingness to participate due to the reduced number of participants. The use of a face-to-face medium in the context of team meetings is particularly important for the manager in order to have the possibility of assessing moods and dynamics. It is also possible for factual information from the leader to be taken out of team meetings. This information should be passed on to the team in advance of the meeting so that only consequences and options for action need to be discussed during the meeting. The advantage of this would be that the meetings could be shorter, the manager would have less time to speak and there would be no more “supervised reading”. In preparation for the meeting, each team member could prepare individually for the meeting and within the meeting there could be a focus on the needs of the team.

As already mentioned in the context of team communication, it should be possible to bring up personal or extraneous topics during team meetings. The interviews with the management trainers revealed that virtual meetings can also be initiated



after work as an “afterwork event” to strengthen the “we-feeling” of the team and to further promote networking within the team. These rituals can also be initiated by the “leader” if this does not happen from within the group, but should not be organised exclusively by the leader.

In order to be able to recognise conflicts within the virtual environment in time, it is necessary to plan as many face-to-face meetings as possible within the communication concept. According to the management trainers, conflicts are most likely to be identified in the context of face-to-face communication, as this creates a holistic and complete picture of the person(s) and the situation, which enables the leader to grasp all facets for a satisfactory conflict resolution. For this, the leader must also recognise whether there are avoidance strategies within the work processes or whether not all necessary parties have been involved. It requires empathy on the part of the manager to be able to recognise whether it is a real conflict within the team or whether it is a temporary situation of an employee due to the “remote situation” and the personal environment. However, if it really is a conflict within the team or between two employees, it is the manager’s task to address this in a timely manner among those affected. Just as in the case of recognising conflicts, this should also be addressed using a face-to-face medium. In the opinion of the management trainers, the actual handling of recognised conflicts, the necessary consequences and the search for solutions are the same in the analogue and virtual world.

OTHER ESSENTIAL TOPICS

In addition to the results of the interviews with the management trainers, the essential topics of “hybrid leadership” and “dissolution of boundaries” can also be taken into account when looking at the topic area of “leadership”. “Virtual leadership” should not be disregarded. In particular, the remarks on the “hybrid leadership” show what a “new normal” could look like on the one hand and what challenges are associated with it on the other. The topic of “dissolution of boundaries” also represents one of the greatest dangers of increasing flexibilisation.

d) Hybrid leadership

Due to the broad range of tasks of the BKA, especially in operational or investigation- supporting areas, it is necessary for employees to continue to work in offices within the BKA’s premises or in the context of assignments on site. This brings with it the necessity to manage parts of the staff virtually as well as employees in the office. This mixed form of leadership is called hybrid leadership. Even after the pandemic, staff will continue to work partly from home. Although the proportions between home office and office will recalibrate, there will be no return to



the “old normal”. Therefore, the importance of hybrid leadership will continue to increase in the future.

Hybrid leadership can be defined as a leadership style that combines analogue and digital working worlds. Hybrid leadership is a style of leadership that meets the changing needs of employees and managers, in that the manager can combine his or her understanding of the world of work with that of the digital world.

The situational orientation to the work environment refers to the fact that the manager in the context of hybrid leadership must be able to adapt flexibly to the changing demands of analogue and virtual leadership. The situational orientation to the work environment refers to the fact that the manager in the context of hybrid leadership must be able to adapt flexibly to the changing requirements of analogue and virtual leadership. Similar to virtual leadership, the challenges of hybrid leadership are in the area of communication and team building. “Communication is a fundamental part of modern team leadership. Ensure regular exchange. As a leader, you should communicate with your team two to three times more often in this transition phase than you did during presence times” (Holl, 2020). Especially against the background that the “short official channels” is possible within hybrid leadership, it must be ensured that the flow of information continues to reach all employees. The challenges within hybrid leadership, especially in the area of caring and motivation, are very similar to those of virtual leadership.

Hybrid leadership is also relevant for the Federal Criminal Police Office, since at some point a return to the “new normal” is imminent and the freedoms initially owed to the pandemic should be sensibly integrated into regular operations. In the context of hybrid leadership, it is important to take into account that all employees are assigned tasks and information to the same extent. Meetings and regular exchange of information must be organised by the manager in such a way that employees in the home office and employees on site are at the same level of knowledge. The physical proximity to the manager must not lead to employees experiencing advantages with regard to the distribution of information and tasks. If such an “elite formation” were to occur within hybrid teams, this could lead to a disadvantage for dislocated employees, which could have a pull effect on the office. This would lead to a process of weighing up on the part of employees whether mobile working could lead to disadvantages with regard to their own position within the team and their possible career prospects. In the case of employees who have a limited scope for decision-making regarding the location of the performance of their tasks and who are dependent on the mobile workplace due to various social circumstances, such unequal treatment could lead to a loss of trust in the manager and the organisation, which could lead to a loss of motivation and, in the medium term, to a loss of performance. In order to counteract such a “disconnection” of the dislocated employees, the determinants of virtual leadership must also be tak-



en into account in the context of hybrid leadership, even if some of the employees work in the office on site.

e) Dissolution of boundaries

Both in the context of virtual and within hybrid leadership, there is a danger of the dissolution of boundaries between work and private life for employees and managers due to the increasing demands for flexibility. The term “dissolution of boundaries” is used to describe the dissolution of boundaries between work and private life. Voß defines the dissolution of boundaries as the opening up and flexibilisation, if not the dismantling, of the structural separation and functional distinction between work and private life in many occupational fields (Voß, 2010). This dissolution of boundaries brings with it the risk that breaks and rest periods will not be respected or will be insufficiently respected. There is also the risk that the blurring of work and private life will lead to employees no longer being able to switch off and recover sufficiently (Paridon, 2020: 1). The danger of the dissolution of boundaries presents managers with the challenge of developing strategies at an early stage to counteract these negative consequences of a dissolution of boundaries for themselves and their employees. Neglecting this aspect inevitably has a negative impact on the entire individual and family life of employees and managers (Schier et al, 2011). A cornerstone of such a strategy is seen in the arrangement of synchronous communication times and the increased use of fixed, revolving appointments for telephone or video conferences. Another aspect of setting communication time frames is to determine daily accessibility. In addition to the many advantages of working in virtual teams, stress factors have also become apparent with the increasing duration of the Corona pandemic. A comparison between workers in the office and in the home office shows that this stress could be caused by a lack of demarcation between professional and private life (dissociation).

The figure shows that the flexibilisation brought about by mobile working means that a large proportion of employees in the home office postpone working hours to the evening or the weekend. It can also be seen that managers also make calls or send e-mails outside of “normal” working hours.

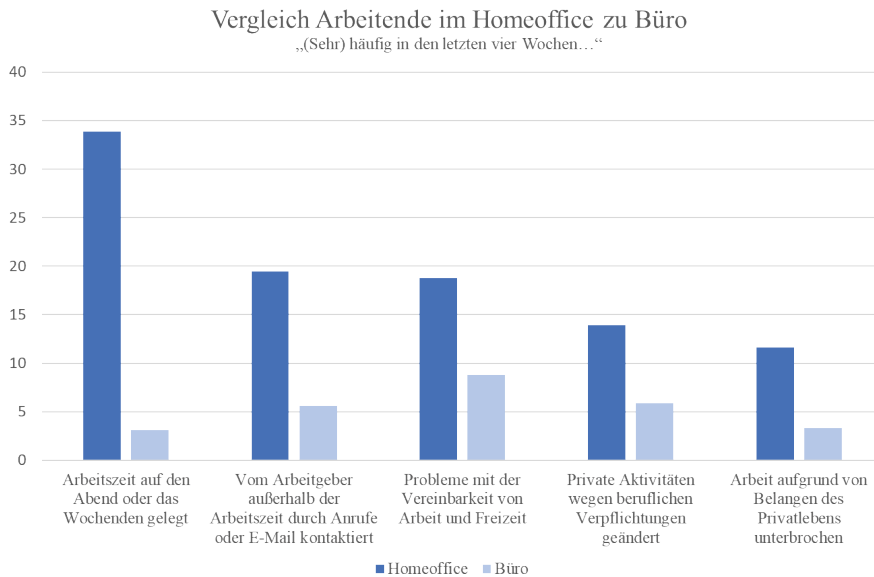


Figure: Comparison of home office workers with office workers
(Badura et al, 2019)

These negative consequences of flexibilisation can lead to health restrictions due to increased stress levels and lack of recovery. Therefore, it is necessary that managers of virtual teams not only consider the requirements of synchronous and asynchronous communication within the communication concept when choosing the media (Resch, 2011), but also clearly communicate limits regarding accessibility in order to counteract the dissolution of boundaries. Managers have a duty here to act as role models themselves. Furthermore, Konradt & Hertel describe that specific moderation and coaching techniques are also indispensable within this communication process in order to recognise the irritations and misunderstandings described above, which can occur due to insufficient face-to-face exchange, at an early stage and to be able to counteract them in a targeted manner (Konradt & Hertel, 2002). Paridon, too, sees the agreement of working hours and availability as well as a combination of behavioural and relationship preventive measures at the centre of a corresponding strategy. In particular, the creation of good technical and organisational framework conditions and the empowerment of employees to use these framework conditions form a further core of the strategy against the dissolution of boundaries (Paridon, 2020: 4).

SUMMARY

It can be summarised from the management trainers' statements that appropriate, needs- oriented communication is the key to building motivation and trust among individuals as well as teamwork and networking within groups. Therefore, it is necessary for managers to develop communication concepts that take into account the individual needs as well as the respective maturity level of the employees within the framework of "relationship management", adapted to the environment, and include a media mix that sufficiently serves the different levels of communication. In particular, the need for regular face-to-face communication must be given special attention within this concept. Communication with the individual as well as with the entire team must be integrated into the work process and ritualised as much as possible in order to be internalised as a structure within the virtual work environment. In order to be able to implement an appropriate communication concept, it is necessary to critically examine existing work processes in order to identify optimisation possibilities in order to use freed-up resources for the "more" in communication. Managers in particular are required to first initiate a change in their own behaviour, to critically review often entrenched ways of acting and to adapt them to the requirements of virtual leadership. In this way, it is possible to "bring along", connect and accompany the employees in the virtual environment.

In order to be able to find free resources within the existing work processes, a constant improvement process is needed, which mostly results from creative processes from the team. Creative processes in particular are currently difficult to initiate due to the virtual isolation, which requires further communication effort and new ideas to promote creativity on the part of the manager. Another challenge is the integration of new members into the team.

Rapid integration is "remote" is difficult to realise and requires the appointment of fixed contact persons and a close exchange of information. One of the most serious consequences of the virtual working environment is the increasing lack of boundaries. To counteract this danger, clear agreements and rules are needed regarding availability and working hours, as well as the unconditional perception of the role model function by the manager. This again requires an individual consideration of the employee and his or her personal environment. A real "mind- change" is necessary in training and personal development. Prompted by the Corona pandemic, numerous employers have developed training and further education offers on the remote channel. The use of these virtual offers is not only a good alternative to pre-session events in times of the pandemic, but also enables employees to quickly and understand the impact of the pandemic complicated access to expertise and networking. Part-time workers in particular can thus be offered flexible access to training opportunities in the future.



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